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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 CHENGDU 000188

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SUBJECT: LHASA: CONVERSATIONS WITH TAR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

REF: A. CHENGDU 183

1B. CHENGDU 184

1C. 2007 CHENGDU 297

1D. 2007 CHENGDU 298

1E. 2007 CHENGDU 236

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CLASSIFIED BY: James A. Boughner, Consul General, U.S. Consulate General, Chengdu.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary: In a week of meetings with Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) foreign affairs, religion, health, education, and tourism officials, ConGenOffs' interlocutors generally responded readily to questions but at times showed considerable unease. TAR officials apparently believe that the March unrest in Tibetan areas was instigated by the Dalai Lama and was not the result of internal problems. A senior Foreign Affairs Official conceded that Tibetans love the Dalai Lama. However, a TAR religious affairs official argued that Tibetans do not love the Dalai Lama since there is no "economic basis" to do so, and "alleged love" for him is just cover for a political plot. Health and Education officials claimed progress in fighting epidemic disease and illiteracy in recent years. TAR HIV detection capability has reportedly improved. End summary.

12. (SBU) From August 25-30, Consulate personnel were permitted by Chinese authorities to visit the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) for the first time since the March outbreak of unrest. Previous cables on this visit (refs A and B) reported gleanings from ConGenOff's impromptu conversations with Lhasa residents during down time in the official schedule.

TAR FAO: Dalai Lama Instigated March Unrest

13. (C) At a dinner hosted by the TAR Foreign Affairs Office at which Deputy Director Liu Yaohua and all FAO department heads attended, ConGenOff asked if they agreed with a Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (Sichuan Province) State Security official who told the Ganzi Daily in mid-July that the widespread March protests were directly fermented and directed by "The Dalai Lama and foreign enemy forces led by the United States." They all broke out laughing. After they stopped, however, Deputy Director Liu asserted, "But we do believe that the unrest was fomented by foreign forces. After all, how can protests arise so quickly all over Tibetan regions of China unless they were directed by foreign forces?" Director Liu added that "Tibetans do love the Dalai, but he has been taking advantage of them for his own political purposes."

TAR Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau

¶4. (C) ConGenOffs met with TAR Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau Vice Director Ngapoe Jigme. Ngapoe Jigme is the son of Ngapoe Ngaway Jigme, the now-100-year-old signer of the 1951 17-Point Agreement between the Dalai Lama's government and the PRC that formed the framework for Tibet's place within the PRC, and the brother of a Radio Free Asia employee. Ngapoe Jigme and his staff invited questions and answered them politely even though answering some questions appeared difficult at times. Jangchup, a Tibetan who heads the Religious Affairs Committee within the Bureau, was calm at first but gradually became visibly uncomfortable as questions became more sensitive. At times when Jangchup was about to respond, the Vice Director or even our accompanying TAR Foreign Affairs officers would interject. In response to a routine question, Jangchup calmly replied that that there are 46,000 religious venues in the TAR and that 50 living Buddhas have been officially recognized since 1990.

¶5. (C) When asked whether monks and nuns may venerate the Dalai Lama, he became more uncomfortable, slouched in his chair and replied that the Dalai Lama left 50 years ago and China has spent a great deal of money to develop Tibet. Tibetans do not love him because there is no "economic basis" for them to do so.

The only purpose of having his picture is a political one, he asserted, which is illegal.

¶6. (C) When asked why the Beijing-recognized Eleventh Panchen Lama, Gyaltsen Norbu, lives in Beijing instead of at his own Tashi Lhunpo monastery in Shigatse, Jangchup started to giggle awkwardly. Vice Director Ngapoe Jigme took over, replying that the previous Panchen Lama spent much time in Beijing since he had responsibilities with the National Peoples' Congress, so it is normal that this Panchen too spends much time in Beijing. When asked about the Dalai Lama-recognized Eleventh Panchen Lama, it was again the Vice Director Ngapoe who replied, saying that the recognition of Gendun Choeki Nyima was illegal and he

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is a private person who is doing well and is in good health.

¶7. (C) When ConGenOff asked how many monks and nuns were arrested in the March 14 events, Jangchup began to twitch and blink rapidly and hurried out of the room. Vice Director Ngapoe replied that the Chinese Government's list of 90 persons involved in rioting included the names of some monks.

TAR Health Bureau

¶8. (SBU) TAR Health Bureau officials said that access to free medical care has improved significantly in rural Tibet in recent years and cited improvements in several key health indicators. Average life expectancy rose from 35 years in 1959 to 67 years in 2007. The TAR population grew from 1.1 million in 1959 to 2.81 million in 2007. Tibetan language materials on preventing epidemic diseases are widely distributed in rural areas. The TAR has 1,339 clinics and hospitals at various levels and 58 maternal and child health care centers. Herder women are given financial incentives to have children in hospitals, and now about half of them have children in hospitals. Foreign health organizations active in the TAR include UNICEF and NGOs such as SEVA (a Canada/U.S. NGO), the Belgian branch of Doctors Without Borders and the U.S. Southeast Asia Fund (Meiguo Dongnanya Jijin). Mobile medical units, the officials added, serve villagers in remote areas. An anti-epidemic network tracks unusual disease outbreaks throughout the TAR. An emergency team is ready to deploy on short notice to areas where disease outbreaks have been reported. Health Bureau officials said that the TAR has been very successful in arranging mass immunizations of herders in Tibet's most remote areas.

¶9. (SBU) TAR health officials claimed that HIV/AIDS is largely under control, though they are on guard against the disease entering from bordering countries and provinces. (Note: see ref E for a contrary assessment from Swiss Red Cross staff

working in Shigatse). The first HIV/AIDS case in the TAR was a foreigner found to have HIV in 1994. Since then, 56 cases of HIV/AIDS have been found in the TAR, including 5 cases of full-blown AIDS. Two of the patients have died. Of the 56 individuals discovered to have HIV/AIDS thus far, 41 have been male and 15 have been female. Twenty-two have been from the TAR, with others coming from foreign countries such as Nepal and India. The main transmission routes of HIV in the TAR have been needle sharing among intravenous drug users, the illicit sex trade and mother-to-child transmission. The TAR Health Bureau works with an Australian government assistance program on preventing mother-to-child HIV transmission. Over the past several years, the equipment and resources of the TAR health bureau for detecting HIV have improved considerably. The TAR still faces a serious HIV control challenge, however, since it is surrounded by areas with serious HIV problems -- Sichuan and Yunnan Provinces, Nepal and India. The officials expressed concern about a rise in intravenous drug use among Tibetan herders and farmers.

¶10. (C) The meeting with the health officials became somewhat tense when ConGenOff asked about the impact of programs to settle herders to semi-urban areas. An ethnic Han epidemiologist with 20 years of experience in the TAR, including two years riding on horseback in remote areas to do immunizations, became very nervous and unhappy and told ConGenOff that the resettlement programs had been a great success. The epidemiologist said that while the average herd size had decreased under the program, the quality and health of the animals had greatly improved.

TAR Education Bureau

¶11. (SBU) A vice director of the TAR Education Bureau said that Tibet's school system offers a choice of Chinese language or Tibetan language elementary education. In 63 counties of the TAR, compulsory education has been extended to nine years. From 2004 to 2007, total funding on education in the TAR was 442 million RMB (roughly USD 60 million). The national "Two Exempts and Three Guarantees" (ermian sanbao) policy of eliminating school fees and miscellaneous fees and providing free room and board for poor students in compulsory education is applied throughout the TAR. Classes in rural primary schools are generally taught in Tibetan, while schools in towns and cities use Mandarin Chinese.

¶12. (SBU) From junior high school onwards, math and science are taught in Chinese, even in the Tibetan language-track schools. Tibetan children experience difficulty keeping up with their peers in the Chinese language schools in some subjects, the vice director explained, because of the language barrier. The vice director explained that the TAR has experimented with

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Tibetan-only education at the high-grade levels. Results have been, however, because the students lacked the Chinese language skills necessary to succeed at university. Tibet University is expanding to about 5000 students, mostly from the TAR. A new science and engineering campus that opened in 2007 will provide more training for Tibetans, though all science and engineering courses will continue to be taught exclusively in Chinese. Advanced vocational and technical subjects are taught in Chinese, the vice director said, due to the lack of Tibetan language curriculum materials.

¶13. (C) Literacy campaigns, according to an adult education expert who participated in the meeting, have been successful in 70 Tibetan counties representing 65 percent of the TAR's population. Literacy work among adult herders and farmers has been successful, bringing the adult (age 15-50) literacy rate in many areas to nearly 100 percent. After first claiming that Tibetan adults are considered literate if they can read a Tibetan language newspaper, the expert later acknowledged that the literacy standard used for compiling government statistics is significantly lower: the ability to "read and write simple

notes." Adult literacy classes for herders are held regularly at township schools.

¶14. (SBU) A TAR Education Bureau official said that there are now 27,000 students in TAR institutions of higher education, including Tibet University, the Lhasa TAR Police Academy and the TAR Agricultural and Animal Husbandry College in Nyintri Prefecture. Of these 27,000 students, 14,460 or 54.8 percent belong to ethnic minorities.

Exam Bonus Points for Minority and Han Students in TAR

¶15. (SBU) Note: The June 25, 2008 issue of Tibet Daily (pp. 7-16) listed students who had been assigned extra points on the 2008 university entrance examination. Many of these were Han students who also received bonus points for residing in the TAR.

Many of the Han students are listed as the sons and daughters of People's Liberation Army soldiers (the 33rd detachment of PLA Air Force unit 95561 in Lhasa was mentioned in the list) and of government cadres sent to the TAR as part of the "Help Tibet" program. Ordinary Tibetan students, including those from remote areas, accounted for 3.5 pages of this 10-page list. The children of teachers (mostly Tibetans) represented an additional 1.75 pages. Children of Government or Party cadres, who are overwhelmingly Han, constituted 3.75 pages, while the rest of the list included children of ethnic Han businesspeople (0.5 pages) and children of "Help Tibet" Party or Government cadres (also 0.5 pages). (Note: The very high proportion of ethnic Han high school students representing the TAR in the national university entrance exam is interesting since hard figures on the numbers of Han living in the TAR are politically sensitive (refs C and D).)

TAR Tourism Bureau

¶16. (SBU) Officials of the TAR Tourism Bureau said that during 2007, one tenth of the tourists to the TAR came from foreign countries. Japan led with 78,000 tourists, followed by the United States with 45,000. Most foreign tourists are retirees, with the oldest last year being 85 years old, so the Tourism Bureau works closely with tour operators to ensure the availability of emergency medical care. Though the officials did not provide precise figures for 2008, they said tourism has dropped off sharply as result of the March unrest. Of those foreign tourists who have visited in 2008, 60 percent have been from the United States.

Potala Palace

¶17. (C) ConGenOffs visited the Potala Palace and met with Jamba Kelsang, the chair of the Potala Palace Management Committee. (Note: Jamba's grandfather and earlier ancestors held the same position at the Palace.) When ConGenOff began speaking in Tibetan, the director continued in Tibetan and provided basic information about the Palace, including the number of monks currently in residence (150). At this point the TAR FAO official accompanying the delegation became alarmed and asked ConGen's ethnic Tibetan LES, "What is he saying?" (Note: During previous visits to the TAR, ConGenOffs have been accompanied by several ethnic Tibetan FAO officials. These Tibetan cadres were nowhere to be found during this trip).

¶18. (C) Jamba Kelsang explained that cataloguing of all properties in the Potala Palace is underway using color photography and a computer system. The previous record was done in black and white. The reception and study rooms, but not the

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personal quarters, of the present Dalai Lama are open to tourists. (Comment: ConGen's Tibetan LES, who has visited Potala many times observed that the Potala Palace cast of characters included mostly ethnic Han People's Armed Police, members of the Potala Palace Management Committee, and monks

dressed in civilian clothes. Potala monks have dressed in civilian clothes for the past six years. The monks generally stay in a corner and observe but avoid interaction with visitors).

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